

AgriFood Forum 23

Peace for Food: Sustainability,
Security for Society and Planet

Key Messages

AgriFood **DIH**
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Contents

Background	4
Hall A Opening remarks	4
High-level opening panel	
From seed to society: Fostering peace through sustainable agrifood solutions	6
Panel 1A	
Zeroing in: Strategies and synergies for a carbon-neutral food ecosystem	6
Panel 2A	
Novel nourishment: Redefining food in the lab era	7
Panel 3A	
Green pockets: Funding the next agrifood revolution	8
Panel 4A	
Forests at the forefront: Data-driven climate resilience	9
Hall B Speeches	10
Panel 2B	
Food security in the face of crisis: are we ready for it? We are ready for it!	11
Panel 3B	
Harvesting equity: Socio-economic dimensions of agrifood sustainability	11
Panel 4B	
Agri-tech nexus: Harnessing technology for a food-secure future	12
Hall C Discussions	12
Hall D Discussions	13

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Key Messages

Background

On 14 November 2023, the AgriFood Forum 2023 was held in Vilnius, Lithuania by AgriFood Lithuania. The Forum, held in partnership with EIT Food, *Business at OECD* (BIAC), the European Parliament and the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists under the overarching theme of “Peace for Food: Sustainability, Security for Society and Planet,” explored the role of the private sector in addressing an array of multifaceted difficulties besetting the agrifood ecosystem.

The AgriFood Forum 2023 was held as part of the *Business at OECD* (BIAC) [Peace for Food Campaign](#). The state of global affairs considerably impacts food demand and supply. We have seen climate change, the pandemic, natural disasters, and geopolitical conflicts, such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, significantly overload food systems and create severe food crises. These events also disrupt natural gas and fertilizer markets, as well as the production and spread of agricultural technology, worsening the situations of producers in the medium to long

term. It has become urgent to move from discussion to action if global food systems are to feed the world, sustain the environment, and enable livelihoods across the food supply chain.

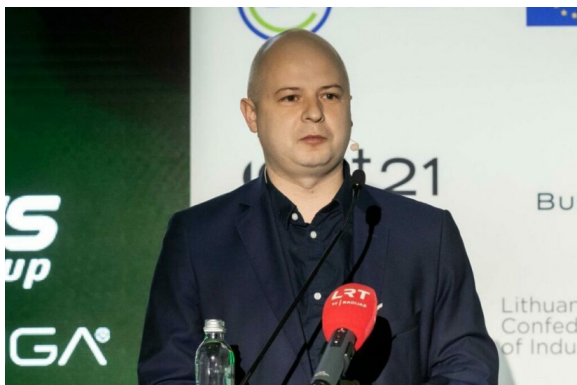
In this context, *Business at OECD* (BIAC), as the institutional voice to the OECD, launched its Peace for Food campaign to bring international attention and global stakeholders together to highlight the current situation in global food markets. The initiative enables businesses to contribute to the OECD work on agriculture proactively and highlights the business commitment to reaching global objectives, including agriculture sustainability and innovation.

Hall A Opening remarks

Mr. Janusz Wojciechowski, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, opened the event, reflecting that recent global challenges highlight that rural areas are crucial for the European Union and beyond to provide food for our populations and maintain biodiversity. He called for strengthening these rural communities,

mainly through community-led local development and innovation, such as smart villages and the [Startup Village Forum](#). Given the strategic importance of agriculture in times of crisis – in other words, as we rely heavily on our farmers, he noted that farmers should be able to depend on us. Through forward-looking strategic dialogue, we must play a role in preparing farmers for extreme weather events or exceptional market developments in the future.

Mr. Simonas Gentvilas, Minister of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania, emphasized that agriculture will be the first sector to be touched by climate change events such as flooding and desertification, and such consequences are to be borne by both the northern and southern hemispheres. At the same time, inflationary crises affect consumer behavior and abate the development of ecological food.



Opening remarks by Mr. Simonas Gentvilas

He urged developed countries to step forward and help developing countries prevent and/or react to such conflicts in the sector, as the spillover consequences, such as increased displacement, will affect our planet as a whole. It is a shared responsibility to uphold the resilience of our agriculture systems, and we must provide solutions through new partnerships and applications.

Ms. Kristina Šermukšnytė-Alešiūnienė, CEO of AgriFood Lithuania, focused on the future of agriculture. It is essential that we ourselves, as well as the next generation, understand the importance of our connection with not simply agriculture and food but nature. We must collaborate to revive rural areas instead of operating in siloes. Our efforts should be targeted and committed to changing the mindsets of communities and citizens, as our collective awareness about the urgency of attaining agricultural resilience and how we can do so is a necessary condition for tangible change.

Mr. Metin Akman, Chair of the *Business at OECD* (BIAC) Food and Agriculture Committee, underlined the critical value of the Forum in enabling private sector voices to be heard by governments at the OECD and beyond. The OECD, as a multi-disciplinary organization with significant expertise in food and agriculture, is ideally placed to offer a platform for discussions and sharing of best practices and can benefit greatly from considering the novel initiatives and solutions undertaken by businesses. Such ongoing dialogue across public, private, and non-governmental stakeholders is crucial in ensuring that respective efforts are complementary and responsive to evolving needs.



Opening remarks by Mr. Metin Akman

High-level opening panel

From seed to society: fostering peace through sustainable agrifood solutions

This high-level opening panel began with introductory insights by Dr. Andy Zynga, CEO of EIT Food. Dr. Zynga underlined the importance of agriculture to society – as arguably the most important invention by humans, agriculture – reliant on trust among its developers – drove the growth of civilizations and many fruits, including art, religion and trade. Today, food systems are at risk – recent crises and climate change events, which will only become more frequent, have shown that our systems are not yet sustainable. We must invest in key innovations to manage our resources well and



High-level opening panel discussions

establish regenerative agriculture systems. Innovation is a learning experience – we must take certain risks if we are to expand our knowledge of what works and what does not. At the bedrock of such progress must lie a level of trust, which we can build through strong networks and partnerships, such as AgriFood Lithuania.

The following panel discussions touched upon a variety of sub-topics. The fundamental importance of global markets was stressed in balancing food surpluses and shortages to achieve food security, with the [OECD Agricultural Market Information System \(AMIS\)](#) standing out as a key example in providing transparent information about food prices and government responses to external stimuli. At the same time, the panel recognized that the agriculture sector still remains the least digitalized and the most conservative toward innovations. The panel discussed private sector collaboration through business confederations and cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial partnerships to bring the industry up to speed, especially as insights from more digitalized sectors could benefit the agriculture sector's digital transformation.

Panel 1A

Zeroing in: strategies and synergies for a carbon-neutral food ecosystem

Ms. Julia Nielson, Deputy Director of the OECD Trade and Agriculture Directorate, set the scene for this panel, particularly regarding the challenge of carbon footprinting in food systems. Food systems exert significant pressure on our environment, accounting for 50 percent of land use, 70 percent of water use and 80 percent of biodiversity loss. To effectively decarbonize, we must

shift to lower-carbon impact products, producers and techniques. Moreover, we must be able to measure our emissions to mitigate them correctly. Fortunately, there has been increasing demand from consumers, government and civil society to develop new calculation methods and reporting standards. Public policymaking has increasingly been shifting toward greater environmental disclosure at the firm and product levels. For instance, the [EU's Green Claims Initiative](#) will require life-cycle assessments to support green claims, and the [Environmental Alliance of the Americas](#) has been promoting environmental impact labels through mutual recognition. However, as much activity has spurred around data, we must ensure that we head toward collaboration instead of fragmentation. Increased conversations between the public and private sector, exemplified by the joint OECD, *Business at OECD* (BIAC) and World Economic Forum paper, "[Emissions Measurement in Supply Chains: Business Realities and Challenges](#)," will enable us to move forward pragmatically, avoiding costly fragmentation.



Panel 1A discussions

The panelists' discussions delved into recent progress and challenges in measuring and decreasing carbon emissions. It was highlighted that while certain subsets of the agriculture sector can be less carbon-intensive than

others, they must continue progressing and further cooperating with other subjects to optimize decarbonization in a broader context involving the entire agrifood value chain. Private sector efforts toward innovation were also shared, with the need to strengthen the link between innovation and the actual market demand being underscored. The [European Clusters Alliance](#) and the [FoodScale Hub](#) were mentioned as venues streamlining innovative solutions and encouraging more invention by providing appropriate financing and a supportive environment for SMEs. Simultaneously, maximizing the impact of existing technologies and innovations emerged as a critical topic. Many tools at our disposal, including seemingly minor adjustments (e.g. modifying the amount of fertilizer used based on past data), can achieve impactful outcomes when applied efficiently in areas that need them most.

Panel 2A

Novel nourishment: redefining food in the lab era

This panel began with an opening keynote by Ms. Marja-Liisa Meurice, Director of EIT Food CLC North-East, on EIT Food's [Protein Diversification Think Tank](#). As one of the most effective investments for sustainable food systems, protein diversification opens doors for a healthier population, planet and global economy. EIT Food's investments aim to empower and encourage farmers through the [Impact Funding Framework](#). However, smallholder farmers or SMEs are often burdened by regulatory processes – governments must develop more comprehensive and supportive policies that decrease the red tape surrounding innovative players and support their journey in taking products to market.



Panel 2A discussions

The panel discussions centered on the value of novel foods and, specifically, lab-grown foods' potential in advancing food sustainability. Lab-grown food typically requires less land use and energy input, thus mitigating climate change, environmental degradation and the rise of antibiotic resistance, as stated by the [Good Food Institute](#). While social concerns about the destructivity of these novel food cultivation practices are present, lab-grown food, among a more holistic perspective around food security, can supplement traditional farming methods. Panelists also discussed the risks of lab-grown foods, such as unknown impacts on health, affordability at the outset of their introduction to the market, and further environmental and/or economic concerns. They underlined that while current and future research will help us deem the severity of these risks, we must ask ourselves first if we are examining our current food production methods – many of which are extremely carbon intensive – with the same level of scrutiny. We must compare novel vs. traditional methods of food cultivation on a balanced scale to ensure that we are not hindering our competitiveness and performance, which directly links to our achievements toward food sustainability.

Regarding the complexity of enacting regulations in this new field, panelists

recommended that regulators reach out to companies directly involved in developing lab-grown foods to design the most appropriate and effective regulations. The lab-grown food industry is still new; this is the perfect time for such conversations. Additionally, governments can assist the industry's growth through a two-pronged measure of providing funding for SMEs and building a robust talent pool by collaborating with academia.

Panel 3A

Green pockets: funding the next agrifood revolution



Panel 3A opening insights by Mr. Grigoris Chatzikostas

This panel was opened by Mr. Grigoris Chatzikostas, Vice President of Business Development at FoodScale Hub. His presentation offered advice to startups in global agrifood technology, specifically from venture capital investors' perspectives. He stressed that the common myth that the agrifood sector lacks funding because investors lack expertise in the sector is untrue. Startups must prioritize a robust product development and testing process, especially amid the current craze around buzzwords such as "AI" and "blockchain." He also advised investors to view rising food prices as an opportunity to invest in outstanding startups engaged in local sourcing that will mitigate the issue, not simply

as a threat. He noted that, after all, current food prices do not represent their actual costs; externalities are often not considered in practices such as large-scale vertical farming, which are ultimately unsustainable. Lastly, he called for increased attention to investments in farming not just by VCs but also by other sources – the food and farming industries are low-margin sectors, and a truly green revolution cannot occur when farmers' accounts are red.

The following panel discussions focused on financial strategies to support the next big agricultural revolution, as the global population is projected to reach 10 billion by 2050. Building off the opening insights, panelists explored key methods of alternative funding. Well-established initiatives such as [Horizon Europe Cluster 6](#) and the [New European Innovation Agenda](#) were highlighted. Academic research institutes such as Vytautas Magnus University Agriculture Academy's Bioeconomy Research Institute also rose to the spotlight, whose funding of fundamental research is essential to further innovative solutions that address market needs. Panelists, however, also identified limits to current national funding and regulatory methods. As innovators flock to countries with more favorable regulatory procedures and pay, others must remain competitive by revising their practices.

Even with the proliferation of unique funding mechanisms, panelists emphasized the need for balance between private and public funds in the innovation of agriculture and a match between projects funded and customers' needs. Investors must address long-term market needs instead of short-term profit, and inventors must increase market awareness by incorporating customers

into earlier stages of their research. Collaboration surfaces as a pivotal measure to this end – a paradigm shift is needed, away from siloed work and toward a systemic embedding of conversations between government and business, within governmental divisions, and between consumer and producer.

Panel 4A

Forests at the forefront: data-driven climate resilience



Panel 4A discussions

Forests, covering approximately 31% of our planet's land area, sustain countless species and anchor the global climate system with massive influence on agriculture. In this context, Mr. Sven Kallen, Founder & Secretary at Life Terra Foundation and General Director of Volterra Ecosystems, delivered opening insights on how the preservation of forests through tree planting can benefit from data and technology. He focused on the importance of planting trees strategically, with ample knowledge of which trees should be planted where based on specific conditions (e.g. amount of rainfall, presence of invasive species) to achieve forest resilience. Gathering and applying data in reforestation can also result in a more engaged and empowered society, especially the youth. Educational programs with schools,

voluntary groups, and even companies raise awareness of the urgency of the issue. For instance, in collaboration with Life Terra, [Ernst & Young \(EY\)'s tree dashboard](#) led the company to plant 97,000+ trees by encouraging employees in its global offices to engage in a friendly competition to plant the most trees. Transparently displaying and promoting such initiatives, organizations like Life Terra can further incentivize others to take part in the reforestation movement.

The panelists agreed on the effects of data analysis in informing global citizens about the positive impacts of reforestation and the fruits of their efforts as they invest in reforestation. In addition, the panel placed heavy emphasis on the role of data in decision-making. Forest-specific decisions on which causes of deforestation are most relevant or how urgently we must react to threats can be made accurately through data. However, not every landowner or forester has access to the proper data analytics tools – it is in this context that projects such as [Forest 4.0](#) operate, assisting companies in building correct data simulation models. It is of paramount importance that data quality and reliability are ensured, not simply for sound decision-making by experts in the field, but also to increase a layman's trust in the role of data and, therefore, to spur further action and awareness. Public-private partnerships should focus on allowing stakeholders of all sizes to gain access to and develop more accurate and advanced data analytics technologies.

Hall B Speeches

Ms. Daiva Jakaitė, Head of the European Parliament Liaison Office in Lithuania, opened the session in Hall B with a concise speech outlining the importance of venues like the AgriFood

Forum in allowing all stakeholders throughout the agrifood value chain to discuss, compromise, and influence policy decisions.

Mr. Juozas Olekas, Member of the European Parliament (Socialists and Democrats, Lithuania), provided a keynote speech regarding the diversity of geopolitical impacts and climate situations affecting Lithuania, Europe and beyond. He affirmed that initiatives such as the European Green Deal should be upheld and promoted.



Hall B participants

Dr. Rasa Melnikienė, Head of the Institute of Economics and Rural Development, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, delivered an informative keynote speech about challenges and opportunities within the Lithuanian agriculture system. Notably, she underscored the demographic challenges of an aging population, a shared challenge by many other countries, as well as the diversity of farmers and farming practices.

Ms. Marlene Mortler, Member of the European Parliament (European People's Party, Germany), stressed in her speech that global food security cannot be taken for granted – in fact, the number of people in poverty in Europe continues to grow. We must aim to produce products with low carbon emissions while providing support, subsidies, and incentives to our farmers.

At the other end of production, we must also scrutinize our food waste patterns. Given the international dimension of food security, we must optimize the amounts of food we import.

Panel 2B

Food security in the face of crisis: are we ready for it? We are ready for it!

This panel was opened by Mr. Dirk Jacobs, Director General of FoodDrinkEurope, who discussed the impacts of global crises on agriculture and the measures we need to take to overcome them. He emphasized that crises have a trifold effect on supply and inputs (e.g. energy, packaging materials), markets (e.g. disruption of open markets through trade bans), and labor. We must devise short-term strategies with flexible policy and financial support, as well as medium to long-term resilience strategies through diversification of crops, business models and investments. Regulations should also be made more coherent, especially in light of the increased fragmentation of the EU single market.



Panel 2B discussions

The panelists moved on to discussions regarding the necessary preparations to face future crises. Supply chains again emerged as one of the most crucial aspects to pay attention to, as

well as the importance of calculating countries' dependence on imports and the ability to adjust when such amounts cannot be imported. Food is a critical need of the state, and feeding the population is a critical function of the state. As such, states must fathom the role of the food industry in relation to a grand national strategy and understand what it should do in a crisis or emergency.

Panel 3B

Harvesting equity: socio-economic dimensions of agrifood sustainability



Panel 3B opening insights by Ms. Aistė Miliūtė-Pranckuvienė

This panel began with a brief presentation by Ms. Aistė Miliūtė-Pranckuvienė, CEO at Birštonas Mineral Water. She stressed the importance of water for everyone and her company's role in providing sustainable packaged water while also addressing the variance between different global populations in obtaining potable water.

The following discussions focused on the role of short value chains in providing organic food for lower-income citizens. Although short and organic value chains have a high potential for advancing food equity, many countries are entrenched in exporting heavily processed foods, and

it would be imperative for countries to reassess their priorities. There is demand for organic foods, but the current prices offered fail to match consumers' expectations. Additionally, concerns about low public research funding also arose. Consequently, many current researchers are incentivized to focus on research that may lend way to additional funding instead of focusing on truly meaningful innovations.

Panel 4B

Agritech nexus: harnessing technology for a food-secure future



Panel 4B discussions

Ms. Gabriela Wurcel, Multilateral Affairs Director at FMC Corporation, set the scene for this panel by providing insights about the need for innovations in the agrifood sector to spur sustainable productivity growth. She placed emphasis on the fact that net food importer countries are much more heavily affected by climate change events compared to net food exporter countries, and also that countries that contribute the most to carbon emissions are not necessarily the ones most burdened by climate change events. In this context, the public and private sectors should support and finance innovations, even for SMEs and smallholder farmers.

Subsequently, the panelists discussed the barriers to innovation, most notably the lack of knowledge and the ability to share and disseminate such knowledge among farmers and researchers. Systemic changes, such as establishing local councils, are needed to disperse knowledge. Common values around the need for innovation and the importance of technology can only be built on a bedrock of collective knowledge. At the same time, panelists underscored that innovators often do not take stock of farmers' concerns, leading to a mismatch between what we create and what farmers actually need.

Hall C Discussions

Even outside the main halls, discussions on more specific topics ensued. In Hall C, speakers and participants debated the following topics:

- **Challenges and opportunities for food processing SMEs in the twin transition:** the “twin transition” underscores the need to navigate digital transformation and sustainability initiatives concurrently, as these two factors are increasingly interconnected and essential for long-term success and competitiveness in the food processing sector. Taking stock of issues most relevant to SMEs, we can accelerate the pace at which they can partake in the transition.
- **Computer vision, process monitoring and data modeling for resources optimization and waste reduction:** how sensors, computer vision, artificial intelligence and advanced process control can effectively reduce energy and water consumption in food processing companies.

- **The role of EDIHs in helping SMEs in the twin transition:** how EDIHs (European Digital Innovation Hubs), specifically AgriFood Lithuania, can help SMEs tackle the Twin Transition in the agrifood sector.
- **Mobile cobots for flexible food production:** How sensor-equipped cobots can reduce monotonous and physically demanding work in a bakery characterized by high flexibility and heterogeneous tasks.

Hall D Discussions

Discussions in Hall D revolved around the below topics:

- **Unlocking Industry 5.0 in agrifood with clusters as facilitators:** explore “Industry 5.0” and its profound implications for the agrifood industry, as well as why clusters

should take center stage as the guiding force in championing Industry 5.0 within this sector.

- **Building a sustainable future for agrifood – enhancing resilience through enabling the ecosystem:** embracing the opportunity to discover how learning and applying new technologies and skills can fortify the industry’s resilience and secure its place in an ever-changing landscape, including the pivotal role of capital and investors in both early and growth phases.
- **Digital technologies paving the way for the Industry 5.0 transition:** the transformative power of digital technologies in driving the evolution towards Industry 5.0 within the agrifood sector, how these innovations can be harnessed, and the strategic preparations required to usher in the new era.



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